

Leading the Congregation in Scripture Reading - 2023

Purpose: The purpose of this gathering is to offer encouragement, affirmation, share insights and point out some tools that might help as we lead and participate in a communal worship service.

Vision Statement: to help highly skilled leaders, called and led by God, spirit filled, to be able to step up, any place, anywhere, anytime and proclaim the word of God, both confidently and professionally, with knowledge, power and authority.

For some, this material will be new, for others it will serve as a refresher. Honing our craft becomes more and more personal as we invest our time, talents and resources. May the Holy Spirit move and make it deeply personal to each and every one of us.

Our God is the same, in every age, working today, as he always has. He does not change. Neither does His Word! God's word is integral in worship. Both the sacred and the practical need to be considered when reading the Liturgy or the Scriptures in a congregational or public setting.

Reading before God's people is both a Sacred duty and a High Holy calling. God speaks in different ways to different people in every facet of the divine worship service. And as participants, **we represent The Almighty God**, Who, speaks through you as you pray, as you sing, as you lead, preach, teach, listen, hear or lead in worship. All of these functions serve to **draw people nearer to God**. They all encourage God's children to **stand firm in the faith; to walk with and be in communion with Christ**. When executed in obedience to the will of God, no one task is greater or less important than the other.

Taking up the mantle of these priestly functions includes all of the dignity, the character and the sacredness that goes with it. That holy responsibility should **never be taken lightly**.

At some point in time, everyone here will be called on to read scriptures, to sing, or participate, to one degree or another, in the worship service. Done well, it is a blessing to the congregation from God. When done poorly, it is detrimental and can literally ruin someone's worship experience.

1 Cor. 8:9 admonishes us to *take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.*

Warning; We must take great care that we are not defiling the Sabbath by treating it as common or giving God disrespectful service. *"To whom much is given, much will be required."* God does and will hold each of us accountable for the stewardship of the gifts He has given us. May God grant that we never do anything that might come between Christ and our fellow man.

When we meet, we read the Bible. Why? Because God wants His people to **prioritize the reading of Scripture**. 1 Tim 4:13 says, *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*

When the Bible is read, **God is speaking**. This is actually the only perfect portion of our worship service! These are God's own words, from His Holy Word, delivered through you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, straight to the hearts and souls of His very own children. And in doing so, the unfolding of God's Word brings light and life and hope. God is glorified by the reading of His Holy Word in our assembly.

There is also **Great Power** in the word of God! We have absolutely no idea, no concept, no comprehension of His majesty and might. *Truly, there is none like unto thee, O Lord!* When the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, **He brought** order out of

chaos. **He spoke** the entire universe into existence. **He formed** man from the dust of the ground, **He breathed** into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. With God, absolutely **nothing** is impossible! In our sinful condition, He not only promised, but sent His only Son to reconcile us to Him. The Holy Spirit moves in and through God's word to **convict** the sinner, **heal** the broken, **give hope** to the hopeless, **save** the lost and **move** entire nations. *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."* And yet, we find ourselves in God's Sanctuary, in His Holy Place, daring to lift up our eyes, daring to stand in His presence, daring to serve as God's mouthpiece, daring to impart His word to His children.

Let us consider just Who we are serving. **Brother Moses**, take off your shoes. The Bible says He is The **Alpha and the Omega**, the same God that walked with Abraham, the same God that **freed the Israelites**, the same God that **guided the stone** from David's sling, the same God that **granted wisdom** to Solomon, the same God that **delivered Daniel** from the Lion's den, the same God that **walked around in** the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the same God that **sent** His only Son to dwell among us, the same God that **calmed the seas** and **walked on water**, the same God that **healed** the halt, the lame and the blind, the same God that brought Lazarus back to life and **fed over 5000** with a couple of fish and some bread, the same God that **Rose** victoriously from the dead, who **lives** and **rules** today, the same God that encountered Saul on road to Damascus, the same God that **Saves** us from our sins and from ourselves, the same God that has **sustained** us safe thus far and the same God that will **lead us** Home to live with Him forever. There we will join all the hosts of heaven crying out, **"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts:**

the whole earth is full of his glory!” The four and twenty elders will bow down their faces to the ground, proclaiming **“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain! To Him be glory forever and ever. AMEN!**

So, Brother Moses, take off your shoes! You are standing on Holy Ground! You are in the presence of **the Great I Am**. What an awesome responsibility we have! What an awesome privilege we are given! What an awesome Savior we serve! ***O, my Lord, my God, my Rock and my Redeemer, Hallowed be - Thy name!*** How can anyone be in that position unprepared? 2 Timothy 2:15 tells us to ***“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”***

Then, how ought we prepare?” (Some basics to hone our craft.)

1 First Pray. Before you read the Bible in worship service, spend time praying through the passage during the week. Illumination, understanding, and joy come from God. Ask God to impress the truth and beauty of the passage upon your heart.

2 Understand. You will be able to better serve the congregation if you understand what the passage is saying. Work to understand it. This may mean using some helpful resources like a study Bible (KJV, ESV or commentaries.) In a particular struggle, the pastor can also be a valuable resource. Know the material!

3 Practice. Practice reading the passage daily. This should include reading aloud (since you’ll be reading aloud on Sunday anyway). You want to do your best not to stumble over words or mispronounce them. If you come across difficult words that you aren’t sure how to pronounce, listen to an audio version and learn the proper pronunciation. There are 5 or 6

versions available on our church APP. You may also find it helpful to ask someone to give you feedback as you practice during the week. Do you know what makes a great choir? They Practice!

Here are some **Practical Tips** for the Worship Service:

1 Be on time. Allow at least 20 – 30 minutes for mic checks, prayer, coordination, and any other contentions that may arise.

2 Dress appropriately. You are going to be standing before the congregation to read and proclaim **God's Holy Word**. Without a doubt, our dress should be modest and clean, respectful and appropriate, so as to not be a distraction to others or be the focus of attention.

3 Hydrate. When nervous, our mouths often get dry. Sip a little water ahead of time and try to limit coffee and tea. Needing to take a bathroom break can be uncomfortable and a huge distraction.

4 Prayer. You should pray for every service, but especially on the week when you are reading. Make it your responsibility to join with other leaders in praying that Spirit of God be with our congregation and us, as we make preparations. Any Pastor, Worship Leader or Elder will pray with you. There have been times when I have literally stopped at the start of the worship service and called on the entire congregation to pray with me. **Never be afraid to ask.** (We are encouraged to pray for & with one another.)

5 Reading Suggestions. When we are nervous, the tendency is speed up. You want to read at a reasonable pace that gives people time to hear and consider the Word. Also, be aware of punctuation. Stop at periods and allow commas to break your pace.

- **Consider Tone and Context.** Preparation ahead of time will allow you to consider your tone. If you are reading from James 5:1, *“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you”*, you should have a sober tone. It is inappropriate to insert a mood that does not reflect the passage. The incarnation should produce joy and should not be read the same as bad news. If you’re reading a prophet’s words of rebuke, or a dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees, it shouldn’t sound the same as instructions for building the tabernacle or a genealogy.
- **Read with feeling.** You should read with expression in your voice that reflects the passage. However, **Avoid too much feeling.** There is a time and a place for the dramatic reading of Scripture. The particular situation and the scripture will dictate when it is appropriate to do so.
- **Be careful not to swallow your words.** Sometimes we have the tendency to trail off at the end of sentences and “swallow our words.” In conversation, this makes it difficult to hear and understand. In the worship service people will miss your words altogether. This is especially true for someone that may have hearing issues. So, pronounce each word and follow punctuation. While you are at it, **Stand Still.** Don’t sway or be bouncing around. I also find it helpful to **empty my pockets.** So, if I put my hands in my pockets, my keys won’t jingle or distract from the reading.
- **Don’t use a “preacher” voice.** Remember you are trying to draw attention to the Bible and not to yourself. However, you will need to **Project your voice**, so that all may hear. In many churches there is no sound system, so you need to speak loudly, clearly and distinctly.

The hard of hearing and the people on the back rows need to be able to hear the Word of God and participate in the worship service also.

6. Ask God to help you get out of your own way.

No matter how much you think you know or how long you have served, worship can become perfunctory. We may desire for everything we do in worship to be perfect but allow circumstances or situations to get onto our thoughts. Rote memory is a wonderful thing but not when we mindlessly go through the motions without even thinking about it. Oh, we may say all the right words but God is not in it. Question, when was the last time you actually prayed the Lord's Prayer or given thought to the words declared in the Apostles Creed?

We ought to come before God with a broken and contrite heart praying, "God be Merciful to me a sinner! Lord, help me to submit my will to Yours and get out of my own way!"

Finally, Give All Glory to God and God alone. The results are not up to you. That's the business of the Holy Spirit. No ministry can be successful without the power and intervention of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who speaks, leads and sings through you! Scripture tells us that when Christ is high and lifted up, **He will** draw all unto Himself!

Called and led by the Holy Spirit to do so, **That's why we read; That's why it is personal** and nothing more needs to be said.

So let it be written! So let it be done! Amen & Amen!